DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 418 923 SP 037 887

AUTHOR Baker, Thomas E.
TITLE Learning from Follow Up Surveys of Graduates: The Austin Teacher Program and the Benchmark Project. A Discussion Paper.
PUB DATE 1998-02-26
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (New Orleans, LA, February 25-28, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; *Beginning Teachers; Classroom Techniques; Elementary Secondary Education; *Graduate Surveys; Higher Education; Preservice Teacher Education; Principals; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Effectiveness; Teachers; *Teaching Skills
IDENTIFIERS Austin College TX

ABSTRACT

This paper describes Austin College's (Texas) participation in the Benchmark Project, a collaborative followup study of teacher education graduates and their principals, focusing on the second round of data collection. The Benchmark Project was a collaboration of 11 teacher preparation programs that gathered and analyzed data comparing graduates of 4- and 5-year programs and provided each program with data for program assessment. In 1996, Benchmark institutions surveyed their 1991-1995 graduates and principals of those who were teaching. Data from the Austin Teacher Program (ATP) indicated that recent ATP graduates continued to enter the profession at higher rates than all Benchmark respondents. They expressed greater satisfaction with their career decision. They rated the value of the early field experiences far higher than did their counterparts. ATP graduates rated their teacher education program significantly higher than did the sample. They considered portfolio experience considerably less useful, and they rated their effectiveness lower than did their counterparts. The average rating for ATP students by principals on teaching effectiveness was very high (and consistently higher than for their counterparts). Principals thought more highly of graduates' classroom management ability than the graduates themselves. (SM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

SP

ED 418 923

LEARNING FROM FOLLOW UP SURVEYS OF GRADUATES: THE AUSTIN TEACHER PROGRAM AND THE BENCHMARK PROJECT

A DISCUSSION PAPER

Thomas E. Baker
Professor of Education
Austin College
Sherman, Texas 75090-4440
tbaker@austinc.edu

Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
New Orleans
February 26, 1998

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

T. Baker

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

LEARNING FROM FOLLOW-UP SURVEYS OF GRADUATES : THE AUSTIN TEACHER PROGRAM AND THE BENCHMARK PROJECT

Thomas E. Baker
Austin Teacher Program
Austin College

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to describe Austin College's participation in the Benchmark Project, a collaborative follow up study of teacher education graduates and their principals, with particular attention to the second round of data collection. I will discuss the benefits of participation in Benchmark, including program assessment, institutional reaccreditation, recruiting and publicity, and enhancing the teacher education program's status on campus. I will also address the limitations of such follow-up studies, and the Austin Teacher Program's tentative plans for future follow ups of its graduates.

BACKGROUND

Austin College, a private liberal arts college with an enrollment of approximately 1200, is located in Sherman, Texas, sixty-five miles north of Dallas. The college offers the Bachelor of Arts degree in a variety of arts and science disciplines, and the Master of Arts in Teaching. In 1971, Austin College implemented the *five-year* Austin Teacher Program (ATP), eliminating the four-year undergraduate certification program. Candidates for initial teacher certification must satisfactorily complete a sequence of three undergraduate education courses with field experiences (four semester hours each), and earn a B. A. before applying to the Graduate Program. The 36 semester hour M. A. T. includes professional education courses, content electives for secondary, and a teaching practicum, which may be graduate student teaching or a paid internship with full classroom responsibility.

THE BENCHMARK PROJECT

Led by the University of New Hampshire in the 1990-1991 academic year, teacher preparation programs at eleven institutions from the northeast, south, and midwest began a collaborative follow up study of their graduates. (Initially called The Eleven Institution Project, members later adopted the name Benchmark Project.) The consortium's objective was to gather and analyze data that would not only compare graduates of four year and five year programs, but also would provide each program with useful data for program assessment. Membership in the Benchmark Project has changed over the years, but the number has staid at eleven.

Representatives of several participating institutions designed and pilot tested a comprehensive survey of graduates' perceptions of their preparation, current instructional practices, beliefs about teaching, career plans, and professional activities. The investigators asked graduates' permission to send their principals a second instrument, later validated (Barton, Andrew & Schwab, 1994), to rate their performance. Member institutions paid the University of New Hampshire to print and mail the surveys and to process the data. The first round of data collection on 1986-90 graduates yielded results that indicated five year program graduates were significantly more likely to enter and remain in the profession, to participate in curriculum development, and to desire more time to collaborate with colleagues. While principals tended to rate all graduates high, ratings for teachers from five year preparation programs clustered at the top. (Baker, 1993)

SECOND ROUND: THE ATP EXPERIENCE

In 1996, Benchmark institutions surveyed their 1991-95 graduates and the principals of those who were teaching and gave permission. In this section,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

I will describe how Austin College is using the those findings, citing examples rather than providing an exhaustive analysis.

Participating institutions received computer printouts showing their own alumni's and their principals' responses, as well as aggregated data for the entire sample, permitting programs, if they wish, to compare their graduates' responses to a large sample of graduates from ten other respected programs.

Graduates' Responses

Recent ATP graduates continued to enter the profession at a higher rate than all Benchmark respondents (90.2% to 83.5%). They also expressed greater satisfaction with their career decision and greater willingness to enter teaching if they could start over (90% to 79.7%). Interestingly, then, ATP graduates' responses were virtually identical to the whole sample's when asked if they plan to be teaching in five years and ten years, but differences show up again when those answering no are asked about their future plans. Of all those saying they will not be teaching in five years, 31.6% plan to be working outside the field of education compared to only 10% of ATP alumni.

ATP graduates rated the value of their early field experiences far higher than the sample, with 59% calling them very helpful and 33.3% helpful. The corresponding percentages for the whole group were 6.4% and 39.9%. This may reflect the ATP's five year curriculum, which includes a sequence of undergraduate and graduate field experiences with increasing teaching responsibility before the graduate internship. When asked if their early field experiences were mostly observation, only 5.1% of ATP respondents agreed compared to 58.3% of the entire sample. An overwhelming 92.3% of ATP said their early field experiences consisted mostly of "active participation in teaching or teaching related activities", well ahead of the 38.2% for the whole group.

Responses to several other items indicated that ATP graduates feel particularly well prepared in general as well as in certain areas. Below are the percentages responding "very good" or "excellent".

	ATP	all
Your effectiveness as change agent in school improvement.	60.5	51.5
Your leadership in curriculum development	55.3	48.0
Your leadership among peers	65.9	57.5
How well did your program prepare you for leadership roles in schools?	67.5	26.0
Overall rating of your teacher ed. program	92.5	51.5

While the ATP faculty feels the graduates' responses generally affirm our program's structure and philosophy, it would be a mistake to think that all is perfect. We cannot learn from our former students unless we consider all their responses, the good and the not-as-good. Our graduates in this sample found significantly less value than their counterparts in creating a portfolio to demonstrate their pedagogical knowledge, a finding that led to discussions in our department. Faculty members discussed ways in which we could make the purpose and value of the portfolio clearer to students -- and to our selves -- , at the same time expanding it to become a continuing developmental portfolio from the second early field experience through the graduate internship.

Another item that caused concern was our graduates' rating of their effectiveness in "teaching thinking skills necessary for independent learning." We assumed that our students would feel particularly strong in this area because they do a great deal of independent research in both the ATP and in their liberal arts program, yet only 47.3% said they were very good or excellent compared to 64.6% of the entire sample. Perhaps this reflects Texas' heavy emphasis on preparing elementary and secondary students for the Texas

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Assessment of Academic Skills tests, making young teachers feel they have less latitude to use independent learning strategies. Or perhaps it signals a need for the ATP to address this area more strongly in its curriculum and its teaching strategies. Discussion continues.

ATP grads were less enthusiastic about the helpfulness of their studies in historical and social foundations and philosophy of education than about their field experiences. While this in not surprising, -- teacher education students tend to favor classroom experience over on-campus theory -- it is cause for concern, even though graduates of the other institutions were not much more sanguine about those areas than ours. We have initiated discussions on ways to make our foundations course more authentic and more personal.

Principal's Responses

Eighty-six per cent of the ATP respondents who were teaching gave their permission to survey their principals. Again, we found the results encouraging. The average rating for ATP students on the 36 items related to teaching effectiveness was higher on most and about the same on the rest. On none were they lower. When asked, "Does this teacher stand our in some way from other teachers in your school," 100% of responding ATP principals said yes compared to 87% for the entire sample. Compared to teachers of similar experience, principals ranked 82% of the ATP grads in the top quintile, while only 62% of the entire group was so ranked. Following are selected items with the per cent of principals responding "very good" or "excellent".

	ATP	all
Competence in communication skills	100	88.5
Planning & organizing lessons effectively	100	81
Relating students' physical, social, emotional and intellectual development to planning instruction	100	85

Skill in classroom management	90	79.5
Effective change agent in school improvement	91	74
Leadership in curriculum development	92	70.5
Leadership qualities among peers	91	70.7

The item dealing with classroom management was especially interesting because ATP graduates' principals seem to think more highly of their ability in that area than do the graduates themselves.

Skill in classroom management	very good	excellent
ATP graduates' self-assessments	52.6	18.4
ATP grads' principals' ratings	30	60

Perhaps beginning teachers feel they are *supposed* to be less skilled managers, or perhaps they are more aware minor annoyances that never come to the principal's attention. Yet the principals' ratings and the self-ratings' on management skills for the sample as a whole were almost identical. Without further investigation, one can only speculate on such a startling disparity on this item between ATP graduates' and their principals. The third ATP undergraduate course/field experience has included an intensive study of classroom management models since 1992, and discussions of management and discipline issues arise in our other classes and seminars. During numerous post-observation conferences, ATP students get personalized "coaching" on their management skills from ATP faculty members. Why only 18.4% believe they have excellent management skills is of some concern. We can take comfort in the principals' confidence in our graduates' management ability.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE BENCHMARK STUDY

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Findings from the Benchmark Project have given us invaluable insight into the strengths and weaknesses of our program. It would be easy to merely rely on our students' scores on the ExCET (comprehensive tests of pedagogical and content knowledge required for licensure in Texas) to assess our program's effectiveness. ATP students always place at or near the top among the 66 teacher education programs in our state. But we would be missing the richest source of evaluative data, the perceptions of our graduates and of the principals who supervise them. We honor our clients -- our graduates and those who employ them -- by asking for their opinions of our program. Participation in the Benchmark Project also gives us opportunities to learn from our colleagues about innovations and promising practices at their institutions, and to compare our graduates perceptions and performance to a large, nationwide sample of teacher education graduates.

There are other practical benefits. Austin College is preparing for a reaccreditation visit from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) in 1999. For the last two years, we have heard a great deal about SACS' demand for proof that the institution assesses the outcomes of its educational programs, causing consternation and gnashing of teeth in most departments of this liberal arts college. The Education Department has been pleased to provide our administration with information on how we are using Benchmark data to assess and improve our program, enhancing our department's standing on campus. In fact, we have been pointed out as a model in a campus-wide faculty meeting. Our public relations staff has asked to use some of our findings to refute regional newspaper articles that claim many new teachers are poorly prepared, do not persist in the profession, and have little regard for their preparation programs.

LIMITATIONS

We recognize the limitations of follow-up studies such as this one. They rely heavily on self-reporting. Furthermore, the number of ATP graduates in the 1991-95 pool was unusually small, and the number of responding principals smaller still. Our numbers have risen in the last couple of years to late 1970s levels, but our graduates will always be a tiny percentage of the total Benchmark population.

There is also the danger of dislocation of the shoulder -- from patting ourselves on the back, first, for simply undertaking such a project. Second, it is tempting to look for what we want to see in the data, highlighting our strengths while explaining away or downplaying findings that baffle or trouble us. Having said that, I think we have nevertheless learned an enormous amount about our teacher education program from the Benchmark Project.

THE ATP'S PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

If the Benchmark Project can obtain funding from foundations or other sources, I believe it will continue to provide valuable findings, not only to its member institutions, but also to other teacher educators and policy makers. Whether Austin College will be able to continue in the project is uncertain, although our program's participation has had administrative support and encouragement from the highest levels.

I make no claim that Benchmark participants were the first to study their graduates' perceptions of their preparation, though I am not aware of any follow up of principals using a validated instrument. Nor would I discourage programs from developing their own follow up procedures to meet their unique needs. National-Louis University, for example, recently surveyed their graduates from the last five years to examine the match between their perceptions of their teacher education program and proposed national standards. (Prokosch &

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Olson, 1998). But whatever the future of Benchmark, I would urge all teacher education programs to look to it as a model for collaboration, for assessing program effectiveness, and for learning from both our clients and our colleagues.

REFERENCES

Baker, T. (1993) A survey of four-year and five-year program graduates and their principals. *Southeastern Regional Association of Teacher Educators Journal*, 2(2), 28-33.

Barton, R., Andrew, M., & Schwab, R. (1994) Factorial validity and reliability of a survey to assess the teaching effectiveness of graduates of teacher education programs. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 54 (1), 218-226.

Prokosch, N. & Olson, P. (1998) Perceptions of teacher preparation: examining the match between student perspectives and national standards. Paper presented at the 78th Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, Dallas, February 16, 1998.